

**Lesson Plan: Letter Writing and Abigail Adams**  
Susan Pope, Wheelock School, Medfield, MA  
**Level: Grade Three**

**Introduction:**

The goal of the lesson is to explore three essential questions:

- What is communication?
- How did people during the Revolutionary period communicate?
- How do people communicate today?

During their study of the American Revolution, students will review and practice letter writing skills and be introduced to a prolific letter writer of this period, Abigail Adams.

**Objectives:**

At the conclusion of this lesson, students should be able to:

- Define communication and know how people communicate past and present.
- Identify Abigail Adams and understand the important role that letter writing played in her life.
- Understand how letters are an example of primary source material.
- Write a full-page letter describing an important event in their own life.

**Frameworks Connection:**

- *History Strand*, Learning Standard 3.5; 3.7
- *Language Strand*, Learning Standard 19.7; 19.13; 24.2

The History Strand focuses on the third grade unit that introduces student to the American Revolution and this writing lesson should be a part of the unit. In particular, third graders are to read a biography of an important Massachusetts person and understand the achievements of that person. The Language Strand focuses on the elements of a “friendly” letter and writing, “an account based on personal experience that has clear focus and sufficient supporting detail”. The research standard (24.2) of the Language Strand correlates with “The Big Six Guide to Information Problem Solving”, a research method which is taught in the Medfield School System. Locating and evaluating resources, including primary sources, is an important step in the research process.

**Steps in Lesson:**

1. (*Day 1*) With the entire class, define “communication” and brainstorm the ways in which we communicate with one another today: letters, email, telephone, photos, videos, fax, etc. Based on our study of the American Revolution, how did people during that time period communicate with one another? Letter writing!
2. Read Abigail Adams by Alexandra Wallner. (Be sure to read the “Author’s Note” at the end which refers to the nearly 2,000 letters which survive today.) Ask students to listen for the number of times “letters” are mentioned in the story. After reading, make a list of 5 or 6 important facts about Abigail Adams’ life. Note that she used letter writing to express her many strong opinions.
3. (*Day 2*) Re-read page 15 which refers to the *Remember the Ladies* letter. Display the photocopy of the actual letter that Abigail wrote to John and explain that this is

- one of the ways that we learn about the past. Historians read the letter, deciphered it and today we have a chance to read it. Introduce the concept of “primary source”.
3. In small groups, working with a parent or other adult, hand out the “*Remember the Ladies Letters*”. (This is an edited version of the letters; the web site to obtain a copy is listed below.) Let the kids know that the language and grammar may be hard to understand; the adult should read the letters. The teacher may wish to highlight the most important passages and students may concentrate discussing these sections. Try to figure out the point of view of each of them. Fill out the reporting sheet (attached).
  4. As a whole class, discuss the letters. (You may want to remind students that in many respects, Abigail Adams was ahead of her time; it was not until 1920 that the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was passed giving women the right to vote.)
  5. Discuss the assignments as listed below.

#### **Assessment:**

- Students will create collages (individually or in small groups on a classroom bulletin board) depicting modern communication devices. Use pictures from old magazines, catalogs, etc.
- Students will create an Abigail Adams time line (individually or in small groups on a classroom bulletin board) including 8-10 important events in her life. Illustrate. Visit the LMC as necessary for additional information.
- Students will write a full page personal letter that describes an important event, or expresses a strong opinion. The letter should include the five components of a friendly letter: heading, greeting or salutation, body, closing and signature.

#### **Materials/Bibliography:**

- Wallner, Alexandra. Abigail Adams. New York: Holiday House, 2001.
- The copies of the Adams letters can be obtained at the Massachusetts Historical Society’s web site:
  - [www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/letter/](http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/letter/)
  - click on *List of correspondence written by Abigail Adams (to John Adams)*
  - click on *Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 31 March-5 April 1776*
- The copy of the edited “*Remember the Ladies*” letters can be obtained at the following:
  - [www.homepages.dsu.edu/smithju/archive/spring99/hist370/adams\\_letters.htm](http://www.homepages.dsu.edu/smithju/archive/spring99/hist370/adams_letters.htm)
- The “reporting sheet” to use with the “*Remember the Ladies*” letters is attached below. This has been adapted from a worksheet produced by the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration([www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov))
- A good site for teaching “Writing Friendly Letters”: [www.abcteach.com](http://www.abcteach.com)

#### **Extensions:**

- For older students, or for third graders who need an extension activity, you may want to try this. Discuss email and how writing an email message is different from writing a letter on paper. See the web site: “The Art of Writing E-Mail” ([www.net-market.com/email.htm](http://www.net-market.com/email.htm)) for some pointers on teaching the writing of appropriate email messages. Then consider the following question. If John and Abigail Adams had had access to email, how would it have changed their communication? Would email have

given Abigail more of a chance to convince John of her point of view in the *Remember the Ladies* letters?

- Use Loreen Leedy's book, Messages in the Mailbox: How to Write a Letter, and create a letter writing center in the classroom. Use the ideas in this book to give kids practice writing all kinds of letters. It even has directions for making invisible ink!

**Field Trips:**

- Adams National Historical Park ([www.nps.gov/adam/](http://www.nps.gov/adam/))
- Abigail Adams Birthplace, Weymouth, MA ([www.abigailadams.org/](http://www.abigailadams.org/))